Section 2: Web Products and Web Development and Redesign

Contents

Introduction

The Office of Communications maintains the official [AHRQ Web site](#) and oversees a number of additional AHRQ-branded sites. Beyond printed products and tools, AHRQ Web sites make information and tools available in electronic format. AHRQ Web sites are vital sources of information about the Agency and its programs and must be fully accessible to users. It is essential that all AHRQ sites comply with applicable laws and regulations and adhere to Web standards and best practices.

This section highlights issues to be addressed when developing Web products or sites under contract that will be publicly available once launched. (Grantees, please see Appendix 2-B, Web Instructions for Grantees, for legal and policy requirements for grant products.) Please contact your Office of Communications (OC) managing editor[*] for guidance pertaining to Web products you are developing. All questions and requests for guidance about developing or redesigning Web sites or tools may be directed to the OC Deputy Directory. Contact information is at the end of this section.

Some AHRQ sites are managed by an onsite Web team, and offsite contractors manage third-level domain sites. To make the sites appear seamless, guidelines must be followed to ensure a branded look and feel (see Section 7).

Web Products

All new or updated content for AHRQ Web sites must be submitted for review and approval by a managing editor. At a minimum, contractors must ensure that copy is free of typographical errors and adheres to the *[U.S. Government Printing Office Style Manual](#)*. Nothing marked "draft" should appear on a public site. Placeholders should not be used for content that does not exist. Government-funded sites should not have anything designated "under construction." Once materials are uploaded, they are published and considered in the public domain unless they contain copyrighted materials.

All publishing rules pertaining to print products, such as copyright, references, citations, style, and so forth, also pertain to Web site documents. Please refer to Section 1 for specific requirements.

Clearances

New and redesigned Web sites and tools must be approved by AHRQ and HHS before launch. AHRQ Offices and Centers must coordinate AHRQ review through the OC, which will coordinate departmental review and approval.

AHRQ Offices and Centers are responsible for ensuring that Web site postings on third-level domains be reviewed twice a year for appropriateness and currency. If there are questions about whether material is appropriate, contact the OC managing editor.

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[*] If you are uncertain as to the managing editor for your project, contact the Director, Print and Electronic Publishing. Contact information is included at the end of this section.

Accessibility (508)

All materials posted on AHRQ Web sites must be fully accessible to persons with disabilities and comply with requirements under Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. Federal agencies must provide equal access to their information and services to disabled individuals. Requirements are specified in Section 508 for electronic and information technology, which includes Web sites and multimedia products. Equivalent alternatives are required for audio and visual information, such as providing alternative descriptive text for images for the visually impaired and captioned video files for the hearing impaired. Online transcripts are required for all audio. Inaccessible files may only be posted if links to them are near accessible versions (such as a PDF file near the accessible Web version). For standards and guidance, visit the HHS site on Section 508.

All new and redesigned sites and tools must be reviewed for 508 compliance and be approved by the HHS 508 Team before launch. This process is coordinated through the OC Web Quality Assurance Lead. Be sure to involve the OC early on in any development projects to ensure that you can properly meet your deadlines; both the OC and HHS can review sites and tools during development. For details, contact the Web Team. Learn more about standards and guidance from the Access Board. For more information about Accessibility, see Appendix 2-C, Creating Accessible Files and Technologies.

Intellectual Property

As with printed material, all copyrighted and trademarked materials must be noted, and any constraints related to the materials must be specified. Public domain does not extend outside the borders of the United States; therefore, foreign countries must request specific permission for use. Citation of the source is essential. Contractors must coordinate with AHRQ on copyright permission requests and follow trademark guidelines.

See Section 1 on Copyright, Licensing Agreements, and Related Intellectual Property Requirements; Appendix 1-A, Copyright: Permission Forms and Licensing Agreement; and Appendix 1-B, Trademarks.

Linking

Links to Web sites outside the .gov domain constitute an implied endorsement and create a business advantage for the linked sites. The Office of Management and Budget requires agencies to conduct a risk assessment of external links, and potential links need to be assessed against HHS and AHRQ linking policies and criteria. If a site deviates from these policies, then the specific review and selection criteria must be justified and posted on the Web site for full disclosure. Outside Web resources may link to Agency resources if the link is not displayed in a way that would imply an endorsement by the Agency of a specific commercial product or service. AHRQ follows the HHS Web standard for external link disclaimers and icons.

Contractors are responsible for assessing links according to AHRQ linking policy provided in Appendix 2-D. Contractors must comply with the HHS Web standard for external link disclaimers and icons.

Web Development and Redesign

AHRQ has resources to provide technical assistance to ensure your deliverables meet the requirements outlined in this section. Please work with your project officer, managing editor, and the Web team to begin development. For recommendations and guidance on requirements for Web sites, visit the Checklist of Requirements for Federal Websites and Digital Services. Also refer to HHS Web Standards.

Go to Section 7 for a visual example of the HHS branding bar and AHRQ banner and footer for Web sites (contact the Web Team for files).

Technical Assistance for Web Tools

For any tools posted to the Web site that may require technical assistance, please provide the following information:

- Written instructions on the use of the tool

- Contact name, telephone number, and email address for technical assistance

- Mechanism for future updates and revisions, if applicable

This information must be provided along with the tool or product to be posted. Provision of technical assistance support should be included in the lifecycle costs of the product.

Source Code

AHRQ's intent is to make tools available to the public; clinicians; health providers; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies. Software and products resulting from these projects should be easily usable by other users and developers. The best way to ensure adoption and implementation for these audiences is to have a Web-based final product that is platform independent. Coordinate with AHRQ on infrastructure requirements for housing any robust back-end applications before they are developed.

Developers must deliver source code for any technical application to the Agency with the product. This provides AHRQ with the knowledge of how the application was created and enables the Agency to make corrections, updates, or conversions as necessary to keep pace with technological changes once the product is released.

Usability

Web usability resources must include usability testing, evaluation, and modification as an integral and recurring part of the development effort to ensure resources are effective for the electronic business processes they are designed to facilitate. HHS provides a set of research-based Web design and usability guidelines.

Prior to release, Web sites and applications, including mobile sites and apps, must be available for evaluation using usability heuristics. Feedback and issue resolution must be documented and coordinated with the OC.

AHRQ follows the HHS Browser Policy. Although the HHS browser list is reviewed and updated annually, it requires an interim review when Web Analytics are available. The most recent browser list, provided below, is from Q3 of 2016.

The 2016 Q3 list of supported browsers and platforms is as follows:

1. Internet Explorer 11.x (Windows 7)
2. Chrome 50.x (Windows 7, Windows 10, Samsung Galaxy S5 with Android 5.x)
3. Firefox 46.x (Windows 7)
4. Safari 9.x (iPhone 6 with iOS 9, Mac OSX10.11)

Domain Names

The Office of Management and Budget issued a temporary freeze on new second-level .gov domain names (X.gov) in 2011, and that freeze remains largely in place today. That does not affect third-level .gov domain names (X.ahrq.gov), which can be requested through the AHRQ Web Quality Assurance Lead (contact information at end of section).

All domain names for any Web resource paid for in whole or in part by Federal funds must be registered as .gov domains by AHRQ through HHS with the General Services Administration (GSA) unless a waiver from the HHS Secretary is obtained. Contractors and nongovernment employees do not have the authority to register domain names for an HHS site.

Domain names other than .gov can be used only if the HHS Secretary grants a waiver to existing policy. If an AHRQ site uses other domains, such as .org, .net, .edu, and .com, the .gov domain must be registered and be the primary domain. The .gov domain name will need to be indexed by USA.gov, the GSA portal to government-funded resources. Domain name requests should be coordinated with the AHRQ Web Quality Assurance Lead, who can advise on current policy.

Privacy, Web Techniques, and More

The Privacy Act affects all AHRQ sites, and the standard AHRQ footer must include a link to the site's privacy policy. Web sites must follow that policy. A machine-readable format of the privacy policy notice must also be on the Web site. AHRQ conducts a privacy impact assessment to determine what kind of personal information is contained within a system, what is done with that information, and how that information is protected; contact Tim Erny (tim.erny@ahrq.hhs.gov) for more information.

AHRQ staff members periodically audit sites to ensure they observe their stated privacy policy. A Privacy Act system notice may need to be prepared and published for users to register on a site if the registrations represent a group of records, under the control of the Agency (or a contractor), that can be retrieved by personal identifier. This notice must go through several levels of review—including the HHS Office of General Counsel—and be published in the *Federal Register*.

Contractors must work in coordination with AHRQ staff for submission of the Privacy Act system notice, to adopt or modify the general privacy policy of the AHRQ main Web site, and to respond to questions on the worksheet for a privacy impact assessment.

- **Use of cookies.** As a result of changes in Federal policy, AHRQ sites can use persistent cookies and other measurement and customization techniques—if certain issues such as privacy are addressed (see OMB Memo M-10-22).

Web Site Mailbox and Records Management

For each Web site, include a "Contact Us" link for customers to submit comments or questions. Web site email is subject to the same privacy and records management issues that affect the overall Web site as well as departmental standards for handling inquiries and customer feedback. Each Web site must provide relevant "frequently asked questions" that are included in the customer relationship management system used to handle AHRQ Web site inquiries.

Contractors are required to maintain the Web site mailbox to provide and update related frequently asked questions and to maintain an electronic archive of responses. This archive is reviewed annually to determine if the contents should be retained. Contractors must submit the number of inquiries handled on a fiscal year basis to the AHRQ Web Quality Assurance Lead for inclusion in Web metrics for Agency reporting under the Government Performance Reporting Act.

For guidance on records management requirements see HHS Web Records & Guidance.

Surveys and Other Information Collection

If information is collected from the public other than the minimum needed to provide a service, approval from OMB must be obtained. This process includes collecting information or feedback from users for surveys or evaluations, regardless of how the information is collected (Web site, email, paper). A notice must be posted at the point of collection with the OMB approval number and a statement on the process of collection. AHRQ project officers must coordinate with the Agency's Paperwork Reduction Act officer to obtain the appropriate approvals. Currently, Doris Lefkowitz and Erwin Brown serve that function for AHRQ.

Electronic Freedom of Information Act

The Agency is required to have an electronic Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) library and to provide materials that can be requested under the FOIA in electronic form. HHS requires Agency-funded Web resources to provide a link to the AHRQ FOIA page.

The link in the standard footer to the AHRQ FOIA page on the main site is required.

Security

Web sites need to be protected against intrusion and corruption or compromise of content. This security is critical if there are business processes or financial transactions conducted on the Web site. Security measures must be specifically delineated for any federally funded Web resources in existence or in development. GSA periodically audits

and evaluates Web resources for security. Attacks on Web resources must be documented and reported to the HHS Inspector General.

Contractors must establish and maintain security according to AHRQ and HHS policies and procedures. The Web Quality Assurance Lead can coordinate assistance in defining and implementing applicable security requirements.

Web Sponsor Identity

AHRQ has principles to identify the Agency as the primary sponsor of AHRQ-related Web sites. These principles reflect HHS best practices for a consistent look and feel of Web resources, reinforce credibility, and support HHS and Agency branding efforts. The four specific principles that should be consistent across all AHRQ-funded Web sites are:

- **Web site URL name.** The name of a Web site must contain AHRQ in the URL unless a domain name waiver from the HHS Secretary is obtained. A Web resource should either be a folder on the main AHRQ Web site (for example, www.ahrq.gov/cahps/) or a third-level domain of the Web site (for example, http://meps.ahrq.gov).

- **HHS and AHRQ logos.** The HHS and AHRQ logos are to be featured prominently on the Web site and in materials that are used to market that Web site. The AHRQ Quality Assurance Lead will provide a standard Web banner and footer.

- **Web site home page format.** The Web site home page has common design and navigation elements with the HHS portal and the AHRQ Web site so that all Web sites look as though they belong to the HHS and AHRQ Web sites. AHRQ domain sites must include the standard banner and footer that are branded for Web resources. The AHRQ Web team will provide technical specifications and templates for developers designing Web resources. See Section 7 on Branding and Design Specifications.

Additional Information

To discuss specific issues or to get additional guidance on Web requirements, contact:

Randie Siegel
Deputy Director
Office of Communications
Email: randie.siegel@ahrq.hhs.gov
Phone: 301-427-1852

Karen Fleming-Michael
Director
Division of Print and Electronic
Publishing
Office of Communications
Email: Karen.Fleming-Michael@ahrq.hhs.gov
Phone: 301–427−1798

Biff LeVee
AHRQ Web Quality Assurance Lead
Office of Communications
Email: biff.levee@ahrq.hhs.gov
Phone: 301-427-1897